

This is a personal submission to the long-awaited inquiry into parental leave.

I am a mother of two children, and am in a same-sex relationship. My partner and I have been incredibly lucky to have a strong network of friends and family, and with this, I know what an important and challenging activity parenting is. Raising children with little or no support must be incredibly difficult, and I believe that parental leave can relieve pressure on families, and allow them to make decisions about work and family based on broader wellbeing rather than simply on economic need.

My partner is the birth mother of our first child, and worked casually and studied when she was pregnant - she wasn't eligible for sick leave let alone maternity leave. I worked full time, and my employer at the time (a very supportive not for profit organisation) gave me two weeks parenting leave and I took an extra week's recreation leave when our son was born, and then returned to work four days a week for another five weeks - and I was back at work full time when he was eight weeks old, while my partner was home along, still adjusting to breastfeeding and life with a baby. That was hard, and money was tight.

I am the birth mother of our second child, and was working with the Victorian Public service, so was eligible for sick leave, leave for obstetric appointments and then for maternity leave, which I supplemented with recreation leave, and took at half pay, so I stopped work 4 weeks before our daughter was born, and didn't return to work until she was nine months, and then returned part-time initially. By this stage, my partner was working part-time, which she continued, but overall, it meant that for nine months, our children had both mothers at home, which was fantastic, and I was delighted my work was flexible enough to enable this. I also was able to start back at work at my own pace, and my manager and I negotiated a gradual increase in hours - I was working fulltime when our daughter was one.

The benefits of leave for us were that we were able to breastfeed, which for both of us was unexpectedly difficult and we really had to persevere. I was able to support my partner during the early stages of her establishing breastfeeding, and it took me four months to get breastfeeding sorted with my daughter. Overall, leave meant that we were able to spend time adjusting to our new family, and having both of us at home was also important for our son to adapt to having a baby sister. They get on famously.

I think that the most important thing about maternity leave for me was that it meant that I could choose to go back to work at a time that suited us, when we felt balanced and I felt interested in working - I wanted to be back at work. In your discussion paper you talked about the objectives of a leave scheme - surely the fundamental objective should be to support health and wellbeing in families, which in turn supports healthy child development. Feeling a level of control over one's life is really critical to a sense of wellbeing, and having more progressive parental leave options would provide families, mother and fathers with more meaningful options for how they want to live.

One concern I have is that, taking the objective above as paramount, maternity leave arrangements currently privilege the often already

privileged - I hope that new parental leave arrangements can proactively support families in more precarious economic positions - those with part-time, casual or lower income employment. This is certainly a role for government.

I have attached the cover sheet with my details, and look forward to the Commission's findings.

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